

FORGING A CAREER IN ANIMAL WELFARE – PART 1



Professor Andrew Knight

You may remember my excitement at announcing our partnership with the University of Winchester. As they prepare to launch their **Centre for Animal Welfare**, I am delighted to share with you an exclusive two-part article by Professor of Animal Welfare and Ethics, Andrew Knight, who is spearheading the initiative. Here, Professor Knight gives an insight into how he came to be a leading academic in animal welfare, what motivated him in this career choice, and how it is part of driving change for animals in Britain and beyond.

You will find details about the launch of the Centre for Animal Welfare on Saturday 21st May at 6pm, and how you can get involved, [here](#).

Andrew Knight is Professor of Animal Welfare and Ethics, and Director of the **Centre for Animal Welfare**, at the University of Winchester; a European and RCVS Veterinary Specialist in Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law; an American Veterinary Specialist in Animal Welfare; and a Senior Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy. He enjoys adventure sports such as mountaineering, and travel photography.

This is part one in a two-part guest blog from Andrew.

Worldwide, some 60 billion land animals are killed annually for food, and over 127 million living vertebrates are subjected to invasive scientific procedures. Millions of others are confined, neglected or abused, in zoos, aquaria, pet stores, rodeos, bullfights, hunts and private homes. As evidenced by the conservative **government's recent plans to scrap the British codes on farm animal welfare** the pressures to allow further exploitation of animals, by those wishing to maximise profits, are constant. This is why it is so important that those of us who would defend animal welfare are able to speak clearly and strongly about the issues, with knowledge and skill.

In the mid 1990s I was a pizza delivery driver in Perth, Western Australia. With its stunning river, pristine beaches and sunset coast, Perth is one of the world's most beautiful cities. And yet, it harboured a dark secret. Perth was – and remains – the world capital of the live sheep export trade. Annually, some five million sheep were shipped mostly from its shores to Middle Eastern destinations. Crammed up to 100,000 or more into ships up to 14 stories high, these sheep would endure two-three weeks at sea, in cramped, narrow decks, allowing little

room to clean the faeces and urine that covered most available surfaces, including the sheep. Used to fields of grass, thousands of stressed sheep could not adapt to the pelletised diet, and would starve. Tens of thousands would die when air-conditioning systems failed, particularly in the heat of the tropics or Middle East. Indeed, deaths were around 100,000 – 150,000 annually. And similar numbers would starve in the hot, harsh feedlots into which they disembarked. Those that survived were typically killed in slaughterhouses by having their throats cut whilst fully conscious, or would endure a similar fate after being transported in car boots to private homes, where ritual slaughter was practiced by individuals with little skill or experience.

The truth doesn't always set you free

The truth may sometimes set you free, but other times it does the reverse. Having discovered what was going on in my own city, I felt I had little choice. I threw myself into launching an Australian campaign against the live sheep trade, working virtually fulltime on this issue for a year. In time, my collaborators and I began to make progress. Launching 'People Against Cruelty in Animal Transport', we achieved massive publicity for the plight of the sheep. Soon I was being interviewed by newspaper, radio and TV stations all over the country. But there was a problem. Time and again I would recite facts and figures about the animal welfare problems. And then someone would ask "What do you do for a living?".

I would be forced to reply that I delivered pizzas, or newspapers. And, for a time, that I delivered patients to a cancer treatment centre, as a medical orderly.

It quickly became clear that people were judging the merits of my arguments on the basis of my job, and my lack of relevant qualifications. I realised that if I really wanted to be taken seriously by the media and decision-makers, delivering pizzas wasn't going to cut it.

The wrong kind of hair

As a young man, I considered the range of options available. To reach and influence the largest number of people, clearly I would need to be a rock star. Unfortunately, my singing was terrible, and I lacked the right kind of hair. Accordingly, I was forced to consider plan B. Becoming a veterinarian would give me the specialised skills and knowledge to authoritatively speak about animal welfare. And I'd be able to help sick and injured animals in my daily work. What could possibly be better?

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